

ARTISTICAL COMPETITIONS.

Sta.—Mr. Frank Howard's communication on the Art-Union cartoons, in your publication of Saturday week, is too remarkable a document not to have excited a marked sensation; it evinces more boldness than we expect from artists, and the candour with which you have inserted his opinions, so opposed to your own, is a fine manly feature in your journal, which will, I trust, cause its sale and influence to extend far and wide.

Mr. Howard's observations apply to two distinct objects, viz., to competitions in general, and to the opinion previously expressed in THE BUILDER on one of the cartoons in the present exhibition. He appears on the whole pleased with the report of the Institute of the Fine Arts on competitions, printed in your journal of the 3rd inst., but he fancies he can suggest a different and a preferable mode of arriving at the intended results. Instead of improving tribunals, almost without exception incompetent or vicious, he suggests as a remedy, that a book be opened in the exhibition rooms, wherein "all the competitors should be required to record his opinions of any or all of the works except his own, together with his reasons, if possible, for such opinions, attaching his name and address." This should be done within a limited time, say the first fortnight, or he should forfeit his right of competition. There is also to be another book for amateurs to do the same if they choose. "Guided but not governed by these opinions the parties who give the money should decide for themselves." To accustom artists to critical examination is certainly very desirable; to encourage a manly declaration of sentiment is a proper tone, in the way to multiply fine feeling, so essential to elevated pursuits. In short, the practice thus recommended would, if carried out unexceptionably, induce artists to consider their subjects and the right mode of treating them; they and the public might consequently learn what really constitutes a good picture, and how to get rid of meretricious incapability; but experience will discover many shoals and fearful dangers at the mouth of this safe harbour, which would be avoided by the more expedient and wider passage pointed out in the report of the Institute of the Fine Arts.

The good which Mr. Howard expects to result from his plan, through the information communicated to artists, amateurs, and the judges, will of course depend on the quality of that information given under the penalty of losing a competitor's rights. Under such regulations, timid men will give as little as possible, whilst their own works will be exposed to the violent attacks, perhaps the insidious undermining or the envenomed shafts of desperate and crafty rivals. Amateurs, the friends of busy competitors, may add the weight of their side batteries in support of those attacks on the humble and defenceless. These will retire and never again appear on the field, whereon the reckless and the selfish will be left to tear each other to pieces. Such an exhibition would add nothing to the benefit felt by the public for the profession of the artist; nor would conventional notions, affectation of anatomical knowledge, the usual artistic inefficiency in history or antiquities, enlighten the judges in the proper direction. If, on the contrary, artists can be persuaded to write candid, considerate observations, devoid of jealousy or personality, then indeed the effects, as far as they went, would be advantageous; but to judge from Mr. Howard's own specimen, purity in this respect is very hard to attain; the opinions he expresses are always merciless, and calculated to irritate a fiery opponent and to terrify a timid one, and drive him off the field. This would affect most artists who have a reputation to lose, and many who have to gain one. In practice, the plan is not so simple as he supposes. First, every artist who does not write in the book his opinions, is to lose his right of competition: this would be unjust to competitors out of London—at Manchester or Liverpool, Dublin, Edinburgh, &c. Again, with the very moderate number (28) in the present exhibition, twenty-eight times twenty-seven make 756 critiques, and if only ten amateurs, urged by one or other candidate, should throw their weight into the scales, then the number becomes 1,036 paragraphs. Mr. Howard's

own sample criticism of one of the cartoons amounts to fifty-eight lines; taking this as an average, the whole would be 60,000 lines, or 2,000 ordinary pages of book printing;—a pretty large quantity for the judged-artist to pen, and the public to read, during the exhibition. Mr. H. will hardly deny that the representative plan suggested in the report of the Institute of the Fine Arts is rather more practical than his unripe proposal.

Really, Mr. Editor, the insertion of critiques and observations from both sides of the question in a periodical like yours, in the way you have so honourably done already, would seem to answer every rational purpose of Mr. Howard's proposition. If the artists choose to appoint committees or advocates of their cause, and their pleadings are printed, then may each judge in the competition, and every artist in the kingdom, quietly by his fire side read and reflect on that evidence, far better than a few could do in a public exhibition-room. How that gentleman's proposal can do away with the necessity of any part of the plans proposed by the Institute of the Fine Arts, in which the criticism is left to persons, as excited, more impartial judges, I am at a loss to understand! It removes no vice in the appointment or management of our competitions; it leaves partiality and prejudice as before; it does not fix and identify the responsibility, or provide for the equitable decision of courts; it gives indeed a voice, and a strong one, to the artists; it removes no hardship, no unnecessary burthen; adds no comfort, no relief to the wounded feelings, no remedy to the pecuniary losses of the defeated. Still let artists derive one advantage from Mr. Howard's immature attempt. Let them dare to express with force and wit feeling, but with moderation, the effects of ill-advised measures for the promotion of art, and perhaps for the ruin of the exertions of native talent.

AN OLD COMPETITOR IN HISTORICAL ART.

Art-Union Cartoons.—Mr. F. Howard has addressed a letter to us, complaining that we term the "villainous perversion of the text of the *Athenaeum*," by our correspondent of last week, "An Old Writer on Fine Art," and calls on us as an act of justice to insert an enclosed reply in our present number. We must, however, decline doing so, having satisfied ourselves that "An Old Writer" has in no degree perverted Mr. Howard's meaning.

The following is the close of Mr. Howard's letter:—"You are welcome to inform the public that my cartoon is a mere sketch refusing to sign the six articles, which in the words of my motto, I claim to be 'a work of mind.'"

"It is not in mortal to command success. But he'll do more, I am proud, to deserve it."

A-NEW PAINT.

At the last meeting of the Society of Arts, on Jan. 21st, a paper was read by Mr. H. Page, On the New Paint Oil Inseparable, or Skin of Paint, by which facility is afforded for interior or exterior decorations. The author, after pointing out the various inconveniences which the public experience in having the painting, graining, and oil decorations done on the premises, proceeded to shew some of the advantages which he obtains by substituting a prepared skin of paint for the ordinary common painting. These advantages are apparent in the decoration of ceilings, or in the execution of any kind of flat ornamental work, whether it be imitation of woods, marbles, lettering in gold or colours, on walls or woodwork, as it is only necessary that the dimensions of the parts to be ornamented should be previously taken, and the work can be completed at the artist's shop or study. The author next proceeded to describe the process of manufacture, remarking that the skins at present made are 12 feet by 3 feet, that being found the most convenient size, but they can be made of any dimensions. The mode of fixing the skin is to rub down the surface on which it is to be fixed, and, when thoroughly cleaned, it is gone over with boiled oil and gold size (a smear is sufficient), the skin is then laid on with a soft cloth, as in the ordinary paper-hanging. Several specimens were exhibited.

ARCHITECT'S RESPONSIBILITIES.

Sir,—In reply to the letter of "An Architect," in your paper of the 17th of January, I have only to say, that I never justified an architect's "allowing" defective workmanship, nor of his permitting "such workmanship to remain."

I merely intended to intimate to the employer that, when no clerk of the works is engaged, and the visits of the architect can only be occasional, certain defects of workmanship (trifling in themselves, but annoying in their temporary results) may shew themselves, without impugning the architect's professional character. This, of course, presupposes that his drawings and specifications are in all respects complete.

As to your correspondent conceiving that I sought exemption from the duty of seeing that all defects be remedied before final payment, it only shews that I have not expressed myself clearly. I always reserve, for a certain period, at least one-fourth the value of the whole work, as a security against such defects; and, of course, feel it imperative on me to see them satisfactorily corrected before I give my closing certificate. The intention of the particular clause in my letter, to which your correspondent refers, as the only one requiring explanation, was to anticipate the unreasonableness of those employers who, declining a clerk of the works, refusing to pay the architect any thing for his travelling time, and even grudging his travelling expenses, have yet been astonished at finding that, during the early occupation of the new building, they have had to suffer the inconvenience of the contractor's re-entering to stop a leak, perfect a gutter, repair a ceiling, clear a drain, or cure a chimney. In short, my circular merely requires an additional paragraph at the end of the sentence beginning "Fourthly," &c.; and another at the close of that, commencing with "4th. Superintendence," &c.

"Fourthly, you engage him to supply all such working drawings and occasional superintendence, as shall insure the accurate and substantial execution of the works, so far as regards their architectural truth and permanent strength, and to see that all defects of workmanship shall be remedied before the builder or contractor receives his final payment."

4th. Superintendence.—The architect is not employed as an operative builder or clerk of the works. It must be clearly understood, that his occasional visits and working drawings, can only have reference to architectural accuracy and the liberal fulfilment of the leading articles of the specification, as affecting construction generally. If the builder, his foreman, or operatives be careless, and a competent clerk of the works be not engaged, roofs may leak, plumbing may partially fail, plastering may crack or become discoloured, drains may yield offensive odorous joinery may shrink, chimneys may return their smoke (indeed the latter nuisance may occur in spite of all precaution), and many other evils may shew themselves, without, necessarily, impugning the character of the architect, or in the least affecting the general stability of the structure. The most trying annoyances may originate in the most trifling defects of workmanship, and nothing short of a vigilant clerk of the works, exclusively employed without intermission, can insure perfection in matters of constructive detail. [The architect does not, however, claim exemption from seeing that all remedial measures be effected. See "Fourthly," &c., 1st page.]

I should say, that my letter has never yet been issued, and, furthermore, that I have never yet made any charge for time occupied in travelling. I wish that I had benefited by your correspondent's correction before the publication of my letter, since I am now likely to suffer under an imputation which is solely referable to a want of explicitness.

I am, Sir, &c., GEO. WIGHTWICK.

VACANCIES FOR INSPECTORS OF PAVEMENTS.—The Commissioners of Sewers of the City of London will meet in the Guildhall on the 24th of February, for the purpose of electing two Inspectors of Pavements. Candidates must be between 25 and 35 years of age, and Freemen of London. The salary is fixed at 150*l.* per annum, and there are no gratuities or fees.